The World Soul and its foci

Part three: cybernetics, VSM, causes and loops

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Summary

In this article, I introduce the cybernetic framework developed by Stafford Beer. He called it: the Viable System Model (VSM). It consists of five interacting subsystems, which can be mapped onto the seven cooperating foci.
Doing so infuses consciousness, life and substance into higher order cybernetics and complexity theory.
This will be more technical oriented than the previous articles, but is unavoidable. The World Soul as an intelligent, conscious field, obviously performs an organizational role in the world and this should be acknowledged. The evolutionary aspects are present as well in my model. All of this takes careful consideration and hence, time to develop.
Readers familiar with Neo-Platonism, Hinduism or Steiner's threefold society may profit from a study of my articles on the Fourfold Logic[1], since those articles beautifully complement and extend the concepts dealt with in the current article.
Brief examples of how these VSM subsystems and foci work or manifest in plants, animals and humans are provided.
George Ellis's five downward causes, operating in nature, will be mapped onto the foci's influences as well. Some diagrams will give an overview of all this.

1 These articles are available in archive.org as well as on academia.edu. The first article on the Fourfold Logic atart at nov 2, 2025

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Preliminary remarks

Before we dive into the world of cybernetics, which is a fascinating one, dealing with steering, control and feedback loops (among other things), I need to deal with a few points:

1. A human being is not solely subject to influences from "outside" him- or herself. At the core of the human being lies a divine monad. This can be seen in the egg-diagram shown in Appendix A of my book on Rediscovering Transcendence. So, it is not to be supposed that humans are completely under the archetypal influences of the planets, Moon, etc. Yes, these do play a big role in life on earth and we thank part of our constitution to their influence and substance.

2. The method I use to develop my model is to gather and assemble information from the wisdom-tradition(s), as mentioned in my previous articles. Based on this knowledge, one can put together a model of planetary and solar influences that work through the World Soul as an organism (and form part and parcel of it). My main idea is to apply the model to plants, animals and humans **on this earth**. Keywords: structure, function, order, development and evolution. I say very little about how the cosmic forces work on the macroscale (in the Solar system, Galaxy, etc.). The idea is to apply the relations between the forces/influences, as described in the model, to the microlevel: from plants to animals to humans[2]. Then one can compare research in these domains to what the model predicts, which is tied to the developments of the principles of consciousness and shown by the Lievegoed phases. Also, one can more clearly begin to comprehend that nature works along analogical lines. As above, so below.

One case study has already been shown, in the first article: the Hero's Journey. Many more can and will be shown in due time. In order to apply the model (a *meta*model, as it stands) fruitfully to the natural world on earth, it seems like a good idea to map the famous Viable System Model onto the sevenfold arc. That will connect my model with an organizational perspective: (management) cybernetics. One has to understand that the World Soul is an Organism that comprises and orders and regulates the Worlds that are found within its structure. Flows of energy, beings, elements, information, channels and nets are involved. Research results can help us understand particular cases (the kingdoms of nature) as instantiations of the metamodel. Those results, mapped onto the model, will enlarge our understanding of the workings of consciousness and its analogical processes. That is enough for the time being.

Note: Focus 7 is now associated with a **causal field** that holds the memory, acquired wisdom and karmic seeds. Focus 4 gives stability, structure and order. Focus 2 also imparts order, especially on focus 5.

2 As regards humans: if one includes the higher parts of the human being, like the spiritual and divine monads, then one can argue that the full human operates on a macrolevel too.

Introduction of the VSM

A short summary of the VSM is given by Gemini AI:

The VSM is a model of organizational structure that describes the minimally necessary functions for any system to be viable—that is, to be able to survive, adapt, and maintain its identity in a changing environment.

(My comment: it was developed by Stafford Beer. He based the model on an analysis of the human nervous system,[3] with its many functions. That means that the VSM has an organic basis or origin, which makes it a perfect candidate to map onto my seven foci model, which deals with a living organism, called the World Soul)

Here are the five subsystems:

System 1: Operations

- **Function:** This system consists of the primary activities of the organization—the parts that produce the goods, deliver the services, or perform the core tasks for which the system exists. In your first article on the World Soul, these are referred to as the "constituing elements".
- **Example:** For a car company, the System 1s would be the individual factories that assemble the cars. For a human body, they would be the organs performing their specific functions.

System 2: Coordination

- **Function:** System 2 harmonizes the different parts of System 1, ensuring they work together without conflict or interference. Its primary role is to dampen oscillations and de-conflict activities between the operational units so that they don't undermine each other.

3 See his books “Brain of the Firm” and “Heart of the Enterprise”. Some study of these is encouraged.

- **Example:** In a car company, this would be the production scheduling department that ensures Factory A and Factory B don't both demand the same shipment of parts at the same time.

System 3: Control / Internal Management

- **Function:** System 3 is focused on the "inside and now." It manages the day-to-day running of the organization, setting rules, allocating resources, and ensuring the operational units (System 1s) are performing efficiently according to plan. It receives summarized reports from System 1 and issues commands.
- *System 3 (Three-Star):** A crucial part of this is the "audit channel," which allows System 3 to get sporadic, unfiltered information directly from the operations in System 1, bypassing the normal command chain to ensure its view of reality is accurate.
- **Example:** This is the role of executive management or a COO, overseeing current production and efficiency. This corresponds to the "management/organization" function in in your first article.

System 4: Intelligence / Strategy

- **Function:** System 4 is focused on the "outside and future." It is responsible for scanning the external environment—looking at the market, competition, technology, and future trends—to allow the organization to adapt and plan for the future. It is concerned with strategy and innovation.
- **Example:** This is the work of a research and development (R&D) or strategy department, which explores new markets and technologies to ensure the company will be competitive in five or ten years.

System 5: Policy / Identity

- **Function:** System 5 is the ultimate authority that provides closure and defines the overall identity and purpose of the organization. Its critical role is to balance the internal, present-day focus of System 3 ("what we are") with the external, future-focused exploration of System 4 ("what we might become"). It sets the guiding policies and values that steer the entire system.
- **Example:** This is the role of the Board of Directors or the CEO, who must decide the ultimate mission and direction of the company, ensuring it remains true to its identity while adapting to survive.

A fundamental principle of the VSM, is **recursion**: every viable system is composed of, and contained within, other viable systems. This means that each System 1 unit is itself a complete VSM (with its own S1-5) at a lower level of analysis.
(Gemini end)

There is a whole field of study around the management cybernetics of the VSM.
A nice study of the VSM has been done by Jon Walker.
Now on to the mapping of the subsystems of the VSM onto the interactions of the seven foci.

Mapping the VSM subsystems onto the sevenfold arc

After some long sessions with Gemini, with some corrections and feeding additional information to it, it came up with a *preliminary mapping* of the VSM subsystems to the interacting foci. I have renamed focus 7 as the Causal Field, since it holds the memory, wisdom and identity of the system. Focus 1 forms this field in the process of manifestation. Maybe I will go into that later, when it seems appropriate to do so. It is a temporary label, waiting to be more firmly established. Focus 4, associated with Saturn, deals with limits, order and structural stability. All these foci deal with dual forces, conscious beings and elements. The duality is clearly shown in the globe system diagram shown in the first article in this series, where the lower three levels are seen as reflections or emanations of the first three upper levels.

Preliminary mapping of the VSM Subsystems to the Foci

Gemini:

- **VSM System 5: Policy & Identity**
    - **Mapped Foci: Focus 1 (Archetype, Purpose)** and **Focus 7 (Causal Field, Karmic Memory)**.
    - **Analysis:** System 5 defines the ultimate identity and purpose of the whole. This is a direct collaboration between **Focus 1**, which provides the initial, willed Purpose, and **Focus 7**, which, as the Causal Field

contains the deep, karmic identity, memory and causal blueprint of the being or system.

- **VSM System 4: Strategy & Adaptation (The "Outside and Then")**
    - **Mapped Foci: Focus 5 (Clarity/Buddhi)**, **Focus 6 (Motivation/Kama)**, and **Focus 4 (Integration/Saturn)**.
    - **Analysis:** This system requires the **intuitive insight of Buddhi (Focus 5)** to perceive the external environment wisely. It needs the **motivational drive of Mars/Kama (Focus 6)** to act on that insight. Finally, it requires the **integrative and stabilizing power of Focus 4 (Saturn)** to balance these future-oriented plans with the present reality.

- **VSM System 3: Internal Management & Optimization (The "Inside and Now")**
    - **Mapped Foci: Focus 3 (Form/Manas)**, **Focus 4 (Integration/Saturn)**, **Focus 5 (Insight/Buddhi)**, and **Focus 6 (Action/Mars)**.
    - **Analysis:** This is the most complex management function. It uses the analytical power of **Manas (Focus 3)** to create models and conduct audits (3*). It is guided by the **wisdom of Buddhi (Focus 5)** for true synergy. It asserts its will through the **executive force of Mars (Focus 6)** via the "Command Channel." All of this is held together by its core function of **Integration (Focus 4)**.

- **VSM System 2: Coordination & Stability**
    - **Mapped Foci:** A dynamic interplay of **Focus 3 (Harmony/Manas)** and **Focus 6 (Excitation/Mars)**.
    - **Analysis:** This subsystem maintains rhythm by damping oscillations. It is the direct expression of the Mars-Venus polarity. It uses the **harmonizing, rule-making function of Manas (Focus 3)** to set schedules (the Venusian aspect) and the **excitatory, alerting function of Mars (Focus 6)** to stimulate lagging parts and maintain tempo.

- **VSM System 1: Operations**
    - **Mapped Foci:** The manifested result of **Focus 2 (Generation)** and **Focus 3 (Form/Manas)**.

- **Analysis:** The operational units are the concrete, differentiated **forms** that do the work. They are **generated** (**Focus 2**) and given their specific shape and intelligent design by the mind, **Manas (Focus 3)**.

(end Gemini)

Question on subsystem one

Then I had a question about subsystem 1: "But the units themselves are the result of a formative process, where archetypes are brought to life via focus 2 and perhaps focus 6 and focus 3? "
(Between [ ] is my addition. Gemini will be designated as "G.", and my questions with "Q.".)

G. Yes, your analysis is perfectly correct and provides a much deeper understanding. The VSM System 1 operational units are not static givens; they are indeed the end result of a dynamic formation process that flows directly down the creative arc of your model.

You have accurately described the causal chain. Let's lay it out formally:

The formation of a VSM System 1 operational unit is a creative cascade involving a collaboration of these foci:

1. **Focus 1 (Archetype):** The process begins here. An **archetype** or a specific purpose for the operational unit exists as a blueprint in the mind of the larger system. This is the initial, willed idea for the unit's existence. [the seed idea]

2. **Focus 6 (Motivation/Mars):** This focus provides the initial, energetic **Martian impulse** or drive to bring the archetype into reality. It is the will-to-create, the propulsive force that initiates the process of generation.

3. **Focus 2 (Generation/Order):** This focus takes the energized impulse and **generates** the foundational elements of the unit. It creates the basic structure, the psycho-physiological components [and materials, ed.] , and the initial order upon which the unit will be built. [possibly a bit of free interpretation here, ed.]

4. **Focus 3 (Form/Manas/Venus):** Finally, this **Manasic** focus gives the generated structure its specific, intelligent, and harmonious **form**. It differentiates the unit, designs its internal processes, and ensures it can function as a coherent entity. Therefore, a VSM System 1 operational unit, when we see it functioning, is the fully manifested result of this creative flow. This is why our final mapping shows System 1 as the tangible expression of **Form (Focus 3)** built upon a **Generated Structure (Focus 2)**. You have correctly identified the complete chain of causes that leads to its existence.
(End Gemini)

My comment: the generation of a subsystem one involves probably more than the mentioned foci. An example would be the origin of a cell, or the conceiving of a child. These are biological processes and are very complex. We will postpone such extremely difficult questions to a much later time. It potentially involves (multiple) systems of a higher order (supersystems) than the subsystem one.

The above is a first mapping of the subsystems. We'll see examples of this in later sections in this article. The whole exercise will help us in understanding how the dynamic interplay of the foci plays out on the microlevel, in organisms as known on this earth. The VSM subsystems pertain to organizational principles that I hope can be applied in this way: process, development, and perhaps, evolution. We'll see.

Examples of the operation of the subsystems in plants, animals and humans

Elucidation of the working of the VSM subsystems

Subsytem 2

Q. How does coordination (subsytem 2 in VSM) work in animals and plants? Which foci are involved?

G. This is an excellent question that applies cybernetic principles to biology and connects them back to your metaphysical model. By combining the information

from the VSM guide (vsm-coop-walker.pdf) with biological knowledge from an external search, we can create a detailed answer.

First, let's clarify the function of **VSM Subsystem 2**. Its role is **coordination and stabilization**. It is the system responsible for ensuring that the various operational units (System 1s) of an organism work together harmoniously and do not interfere with each other. Its main job is to "damp oscillations" and "resolve conflicts" between parts that might otherwise compete for the same resources [cite: vsm-coop-walker.pdf, p. 39].

How Coordination (Subsystem 2) Works in Animals

In an animal, the primary "operational units" (System 1s) are the different organs and organ systems (e.g., the digestive system, the muscular system, the respiratory system). Coordination between them is managed by two main components that function as System 2:

1. **The Autonomic Nervous System (ANS):** This is the rapid, real-time coordination system. It balances the "fight or flight" (sympathetic) and "rest and digest" (parasympathetic) branches to ensure that organs work in concert.
- **Example:** During exercise, the ANS coordinates the simultaneous increase in heart rate, breathing rate, and blood flow to the muscles, while decreasing activity in the digestive system. This prevents the systems from competing; the heart doesn't slow down while the muscles are demanding more oxygen. This is a classic anti-oscillation function.

2. **The Endocrine (Hormonal) System:** This is a slower, longer-term coordination system. Hormones released into the bloodstream act as chemical messengers that regulate processes like growth, metabolism, and stress response across the entire body, ensuring all parts are developing in a coordinated manner.
- **Example:** Hormones like adrenaline coordinate the body's entire stress response, while growth hormones ensure that bones, muscles, and organs develop in proportion to one another over years.

How Coordination (Subsystem 2) Works in Plants

In a plant, the operational units (System 1s) are the roots, the stem, the leaves, and the reproductive parts (flowers, fruits). While they lack a nervous system, they have highly effective coordinating systems:

1. **The Hormonal System:** Plant hormones (like auxins, cytokinins, and gibberellins) are the primary coordinators. They are produced in one part of the plant and travel to others to regulate growth and development.

- **Example:** Auxins produced in the shoot tip flow downward to inhibit the growth of lateral buds, ensuring the main stem grows tall to reach the light (a phenomenon called apical dominance). This coordinates the plant's energy, preventing it from wasting resources on side branches when the primary goal is height. This prevents a "conflict" over where to allocate growth resources.

2. **The Vascular System (Xylem and Phloem):** This system acts as a physical coordination network. It transports water and minerals from the roots to the leaves (xylem) and sugars from the leaves to the rest of the plant (phloem). This ensures a stable and balanced distribution of essential resources between the operational parts.

Which Foci Are Involved in subsystem 2?

The function of Subsystem 2—creating stability through harmonious, ordered interaction—is not governed by a single focus in your model, but primarily by the **Yin** or structuring foci.

- **Focus 3 (Differentiation, Form / Venus): The Primary Governor of Coordination.**
- Subsystem 2's entire purpose is to maintain a stable, harmonious order between differentiated parts. This is the exact function of **Focus 3**, governed by **Venus**. Proclus describes Venus as the cause of "all the harmony and analogy in the universe" and the power that inserts "order and harmony into things contrary and discordant." The stable patterns enforced by the ANS or plant hormones are the living expression of this harmonizing, form-giving principle.

Focus 6 - (The Martian Aspect: Kama/Motivation & Excitation): The influence of Focus 6 is twofold and essential:

- **It is the Source of the Problem:** The raw, energetic, and self-motivated drives of the individual operational units are a Martian quality. System 2 exists precisely to manage these potentially conflicting energies.
- **It is Part of the Solution:** As we discussed, a purely passive, inhibitory system is not enough. To maintain rhythm, System 2 must also be able to send **excitatory** signals—an alert or a "hurry up" command—to a part of the system that is falling behind. This energetic, activating signal is a direct expression of the Martian principle of Focus 6.

- **Focus 5 (Expansion, Clarity / Mercury): The Principle of Communication.**
- For coordination to work, the signals must be clear. Whether it's a nerve impulse, a hormone molecule binding to a receptor, or a chemical signal in a plant, the message must be transmitted with **clarity**. This is the domain of **Focus 5**, governed by **Mercury**, the principle of interpretation and communication. It ensures the coordinating signals are sent and received without ambiguity.

- **Focus 1 (Archetype, Impulse): The Ultimate Reference Point.**
- The stability maintained by System 2 is not arbitrary. It serves to keep the organism true to its essential nature or **archetype**, which is the domain of **Focus 1**. The homeostatic balance maintained by the ANS, for example, is always working to keep the organism aligned with the archetypal blueprint of health for its species. Focus 1 provides the ultimate purpose for the coordination.

S**ubsystem 3 (VSM)**

Q. How does subsystem 3 (VSM) works in plants and animals? It seems there is some overlap with subsystem 2? Which role does subsystem 3 play in guiding subsystem 2?

G. Excellent question. You've correctly identified that there seems to be an overlap between the stabilizing function of Subsystem 2 and the managing function of Subsystem 3. This is a crucial point in understanding how a viable system, like an organism, operates. By synthesizing the principles in the VSM guide with biological knowledge and your sevenfold model, we can clarify these roles.

1. How Subsystem 3 Works in Plants and Animals

While Subsystem 2 provides the passive, stable framework for coordination, **Subsystem 3 is the active, real-time manager of the "Inside and Now."** Its primary role is **optimization**: it constantly assesses the state of all the operational units (System 1s) and allocates resources to generate synergy and improve overall performance.

- In Animals:

  The primary locus of Subsystem 3 is the brainstem and hypothalamus. These structures act as the master regulators of homeostasis. They receive a constant stream of information from the entire body (the equivalent of a "System 3 model") about temperature, blood pressure, glucose levels, etc. Based on this holistic view, they make active decisions to optimize the whole system.

- **Example (Thermoregulation):** If the body gets cold, the hypothalamus (S3) doesn't just rely on passive rules. It actively initiates a synergistic, multi-organ response: it makes muscles shiver to generate heat, constricts blood vessels in the skin to conserve warmth, and may even create the conscious urge to seek shelter. It is *optimizing* the entire organism's resources for the single goal of survival.

- In Plants:

  Plants lack a central brain, so their Subsystem 3 is a distributed hormonal control system. It optimizes the plant's performance by strategically allocating resources in response to internal and external conditions.

- **Example (Drought Response):** During a drought, a plant does more than just passively lose water. Its hormonal system (S3) makes an executive, optimizing decision: it may trigger the shedding of leaves (sacrificing some solar-collecting S1s) to drastically reduce water loss, thereby ensuring the survival of the core operational units—the stem and roots. This is not just coordination; it is an active, strategic re-allocation of resources to optimize the viability of the whole plant.

2. Overlap and Guidance Between Subsystem 2 and Subsystem 3

You are correct, there is a close relationship and an apparent overlap, but their functions are distinct. The key is to see them as a partnership between a **stable**

structure (S2) and an **active manager (S3)**.

- **The Relationship:** Subsystem 2 provides the fixed, reliable channels and protocols that ensure stability. Subsystem 3 *uses* these stable channels to actively manage and optimize the system.

- **Analogy:** Think of a city's road network. The layout of the streets, the traffic laws, and the timing of the traffic lights are all **Subsystem 2**. They are the stable, pre-agreed system designed to prevent chaos. The central traffic control center that monitors traffic flow in real-time and actively changes the timing of the lights on certain roads to ease congestion is **Subsystem 3**. S3 works *through* the infrastructure provided by S2 to achieve optimization.

- **The Role of S3 in Guiding S2:**

  This is a crucial, higher-level interaction. S3 does not typically "command" S2 in the short term. However, S3 is constantly monitoring the performance of the entire system. If S3 consistently finds that an existing S2 protocol (a "rule of the road") is inefficient or causing problems, it is the function of S3 to signal this inadequacy. In an organization, this would be a manager reporting to policy-makers that a certain regulation is counterproductive.
- In the human mind, this is the process of **conscious self-regulation**. You might have an automatic, unstable emotional pattern (a faulty S2 protocol). Through self-awareness and effort (your "inner manager," S3), you can observe this pattern and work to consciously change it. You are using the active, optimizing function of S3 to guide the evolution and improvement of your passive, stabilizing function (S2).

Which Foci are Involved in Subsystem 3?

The active, managing, and optimizing nature of Subsystem 3 aligns it primarily with the **Yang** or dynamic foci. [AND focus 3, see below; for the Yang foci see previous article, appendix B]

VSM Subsystem 3 involves :

Focus 3 (Manas/Venus).
Iit is a central and essential component for System 3 to perform its function.

Here is the reasoning why:

1. **System 3's Function:** The role of VSM System 3 is **Operational Control and Optimization**. Its job is to manage the "Inside and Now"—to understand the entire collection of operational units (System 1) and find ways to make them work together more efficiently to create synergy.
2. **Focus 3's Function:** In your corrected model, **Focus 3 is the seat of Manas (Mind)**, the principle of intelligence, analysis, and the creation of harmonious form (its Venusian quality).
3. **The Connection:** To optimize a complex system, a "mind" is required. System 3 needs the Manasic capabilities of Focus 3 to:
    - **Model the System:** Create a coherent mental or informational model of how all the different operational parts work and interact.
    - **Analyze Performance:** Analyze the data coming from the operational units to identify inefficiencies and opportunities for improvement.
    - **Design the Solution:** Formulate an intelligent plan or a new set of rules to create the desired synergy and harmony.
    - **Process Audits (System 3*):** The audit function (3*) provides deep, factual data. It is the Manasic intelligence of Focus 3 that analyzes and understands this data to inform its decisions.

Therefore, **Focus 3 (Manas)** provides the essential intellectual and analytical horsepower that enables VSM System 3 to perform its role as the intelligent internal manager of the organization.

- **Focus 4 (Integration, Action):** The core of S3's function is to *actively* **integrate** the different parts of the system to produce a synergistic result. It is the power that takes action to optimize the "Inside and Now."

- **Focus 5 (Expansion, Clarity / Mercury):** To optimize, S3 needs a clear and accurate model of the entire operation. It relies on the analytical **clarity** of **Focus 5 (Mercury)** to understand the performance data and identify opportunities for improvement. The audit function (System 3*) is a pure expression of this focus.

- **Focus 6 (Motivation, Transformation):** In a crisis (like the drought example), S3's optimization becomes a **transformative** act, driven by the **motivation** to survive. Focus 6 provides the energetic impetus for S3 to make drastic, life-saving changes.
  In summary, **Subsystem 2** (governed by the Yin[4] foci of Form and Clarity) provides the stable, harmonious structure.
  Subsystem 3 (governed by the Yang foci of Action and Motivation, guided by Clarity) is the active manager that works *through* that structure to optimize the whole system in real-time.

Subsystem 4

Q. Subsystem 4 is concerned with monitoring outside influences or threats. It surely is involved with subsystem 3 and possibly subsystem 2? How does this work in plants, animals and humans?

G. This is a crucial question because the interaction between monitoring the outside world (Subsystem 4) and managing the inside world (Subsystem 3) is the very heart of how a viable system adapts and survives. Your intuition that they are deeply involved is correct, and Subsystem 2 plays a key supporting role.

Let's break this down using the provided VSM guide and external biological knowledge, then apply it to plants, animals, and humans.

1. The Relationship Between Subsystems 4, 3, and 2

First, let's clarify the relationship based on the VSM guide (vsm-coop-walker.pdf). The model shows an intense, continuous, and inseparable loop between System 4 and System 3.

- **System 4 (The "Outside and Then"):** This is the strategic function. It scans the external environment for future threats and opportunities. It is the "external eye" of the organization.

- **System 3 (The "Inside and Now"):** This is the operational management function. It manages the day-to-day workings of the organization and understands its current

4 The Yin/Yang division of the foci is briefly discussed in appendix B of my previous article on the World Soul

capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses. It is the "internal eye."

How They Work Together:

The VSM guide emphasizes that these two systems must be in constant communication. A plan from System 4 is useless if the organization doesn't have the internal capacity (known by System 3) to execute it. Conversely, System 3 optimizing an obsolete process is a waste of resources if System 4 sees that the market has moved on. The guide states, "all plans must evolve in the context of both external threats and opportunities, and of the internal capabilities of the System-in-Focus" [cite: vsm-coop-walker.pdf, p. 63].

The Role of Subsystem 2:

Subsystem 2 (Stability) provides the stable protocols, rules, and structures that System 3 currently manages. When System 4's strategic plans are implemented via System 3, it often involves modifying or creating new System 2 protocols to embed the new way of operating for the long term.

2. How This Works in Plants, Animals, and Humans

This dynamic interplay is not just organizational theory; it is fundamental to all life.

In Plants:

- **System 4 (External Monitoring):** A plant constantly monitors its environment for future-oriented data. It senses the changing length of days (photoperiodism), prolonged temperature drops, and the quality of light (which indicates if it's being shaded by a competitor).
- **S4/S3 Interaction:** When a plant's System 4 senses that winter is approaching (shorter days, colder temperatures), it doesn't just react day-by-day. It formulates a long-term strategic plan: "Prepare for dormancy." This strategic imperative is communicated to its internal management, System 3 (its distributed hormonal system). System 3 then actively *optimizes* the plant for this future state by initiating leaf drop (to conserve water), moving sugars to the roots for storage, and hardening buds against the cold. The strategy (S4) is balanced with the plant's internal

operational capacity (S3).

- **Role of S2:** The underlying genetic programs that dictate *how* a leaf detaches or *how* a bud becomes dormant are the stable System 2 protocols that are activated by the S3/S4 decision.

In Animals:

- **System 4 (External Monitoring):** An animal uses its senses to develop a strategic model of its world. A squirrel notices acorns are becoming plentiful and the air is getting colder. A migratory bird senses the subtle change in daylight hours. This isn't just about immediate threats; it's about future survival.

- **S4/S3 Interaction:** The animal's brain (the S4/S3 complex) processes this external data. The S4 function formulates the strategy: "It is time to prepare for winter." The S3 function translates this into operational commands: it overrides the immediate desire to eat all the food and instead triggers the drive to hoard and cache nuts. It actively manages the animal's present behavior (its "Inside and Now") to serve the long-term strategic plan.

- **Role of S2:** The instinctual pattern of digging a hole and burying a nut is the stable, reliable System 2 protocol. The S4/S3 interplay determines *when* and *how frequently* to initiate this protocol based on its assessment of the future environment.

In Humans:

- **System 4 (External Monitoring):** This is the function of our prefrontal cortex when we engage in strategic thinking. We read an article about a new technology disrupting our industry (threat/opportunity). We look at job market trends. We receive a health diagnosis that indicates a future risk.

- **S4/S3 Interaction:** This is the constant internal dialogue that balances ambition with reality.
- **Example:** Your System 4 realizes, "To stay relevant in my career, I need to learn AI skills." Your System 3 assesses your current reality: "I have no free time and my budget is tight." The S4/S3 loop then must create a realistic plan. System 4 might

adjust its ambition (e.g., "I will start with a free online course instead of a full degree"), and System 3 must then actively re-allocate internal resources (e.g., "I will wake up an hour earlier") to implement the plan.

- **Role of S2:** Our daily habits are our System 2. When our S4/S3 decides we need to get healthier, the long-term goal is to use our willpower (S3) to build a *new, stable S2 habit* (like going to the gym three times a week). Once it becomes an automatic habit (a new S2 protocol), it no longer requires constant management from S3, freeing up our mental resources for new strategic challenges identified by S4.
  In all cases, the pattern is the same: the organism's viability depends on its ability to use information about the future (S4) to intelligently manage and optimize its present operations (S3), often by adapting or creating new stable routines (S2).

Summary table clarifying the deep connections between the VSM subsystems and the esoteric principles of the foci, including control features:

VSM Subsystem	Primary Function	Governing Foci	Explanation
System 5	Policy & Identity	Focus 1 & Focus 7	System 5 sets the ultimate purpose and identity for the whole. This is a collaboration between the initial, willed **Archetype (Focus 1)** and the system's deep memory and causal blueprint stored in the Causal Field **(Focus 7)**. It answers the question: "Why do we exist?"
System 4	Strategy & Adaptation	Focus 4, Focus 5, & Focus 6	System 4 looks to the "Outside and Then," adapting the system for future viability. It requires the intuitive **insight of Buddhi (Focus 5)** to perceive trends, the **motivational drive of Mars (Focus 6)** to pursue a strategy, and the stabilizing power of **Saturn (Focus 4)** to integrate

VSM Subsystem	Primary Function	Governing Foci	Explanation
			these plans with reality.
System 3	Control & Optimization	Focus 3, Focus 4, Focus 5, & Focus 6	This is the active manager of the "Inside and Now." (internal operations). It uses the analytical **intellect of Manas (Focus 3)** to model and understand the system, guided by the **wisdom of Buddhi (Focus 5)**. It then implements its optimizing plans via **integration (Focus 4)**, using the **executive force of Mars (Focus 6)** to intervene when necessary.
System 2	Coordination & Stability	Focus 3 & Focus 6	System 2 provides stability by managing the dynamic Mars-Venus polarity. It uses the harmonizing, rule-making aspect of **Manas/Venus (Focus 3)** to design schedules and protocols, and the excitatory aspect of **Mars (Focus 6)** to stimulate parts that are lagging, thus maintaining a dynamic rhythm.
System 1	Operations	Focus 2 & Focus 3	The operational units are the tangible result of the creative process. They are first **generated** from raw substance (**Focus 2**) and then given their specific, intelligent, and functional **form** by the mind, **Manas (Focus 3)**. They are the "what" that all the higher control systems manage.

Question about focus 7 (Causal Field; memory; stored experiences)

Q. It seems that focus 7, as a repository of experience, must be involved with subsystem 4 and 3 (and perhaps subsystem 2 as well)?

G. This is a question that adds another layer of depth to the VSM/foci correlation by introducing the role of memory and clarifying the nature of the planetary forces.

1. The Role of Focus 7 in VSM Subsystems 2, 3, and 4

You are absolutely correct to identify this connection. **Focus 7 (Wisdom, fulfillment)**, as the repository of experience, is deeply involved with Subsystems 2, 3, and 4. However, it is not an *active* participant in the same way. Instead, it acts as the **system's long-term memory or master library**, which the active subsystems constantly consult to inform their decisions.

- **Focus 7 and Subsystem 4 (Strategy):**
- When S4 formulates future plans, it does not do so in a vacuum. It draws upon the accumulated **wisdom (Focus 7)** of the organization's past successes and failures. A wise strategic choice is one that has learned from history. S4 looks to the future, but it stands on the foundation of the past, which is embodied in Focus 7.

- **Focus 7 and Subsystem 3 (Optimization):**
- When S3 optimizes the "Inside and Now," it relies on established "best practices." These best practices are nothing more than the codified **wisdom (Focus 7)** gained from years of operational experience. S3's ability to make effective real-time decisions is directly proportional to the quality of the experiential knowledge it can access from the system's memory (Focus 7).

- **Focus 7 and Subsystem 2 (Stability):**
- The stable rules, protocols, and culture that constitute S2 are the long-term result of the organization's history. A wise and resilient culture (a strong S2) is the sedimentation of years of experience and learning. The **wisdom of Focus 7** informs the very design of the stable structures that ensure harmony. A system learns over time which rules work and which lead to chaos, and it codifies this learning into its S2 protocols.

In summary, Focus 7 is the **repository of all learned experience**. It is the fulfilled wisdom of the system that provides the essential context, historical data, and proven principles that make the active management of Systems 2, 3, and 4 intelligent and effective rather than merely reactive.

The Dynamic Control Loops of a Viable System

Q. So, can you provide a **picture of the feedback and feedforward loops and adaptive control (including adaptive information control)** involved in the actual operation of the VSM subsystems, based on the seven foci? Proceed from the standpoint of the interaction of the inside with the outside world.

G. This is an excellent, high-level question that requires synthesizing the cybernetic concepts of control with your metaphysical model of the seven foci. The result is a dynamic picture of how a viable system—from a human being to an organization—intelligently interacts with its environment.

Here are the diagrams and explanations of the feedback, feedforward, and adaptive control loops, showing how they operate through the interplay of the seven foci.

A viable system maintains its existence through three interconnected types of control loops that govern its relationship with the outside world.

1. **Feedback Loop (Reactive Control):** This is the fundamental loop for maintaining internal stability. It answers the question: "How am I doing *now*, and do I need to correct course?" It is primarily focused on the **Inside World**.

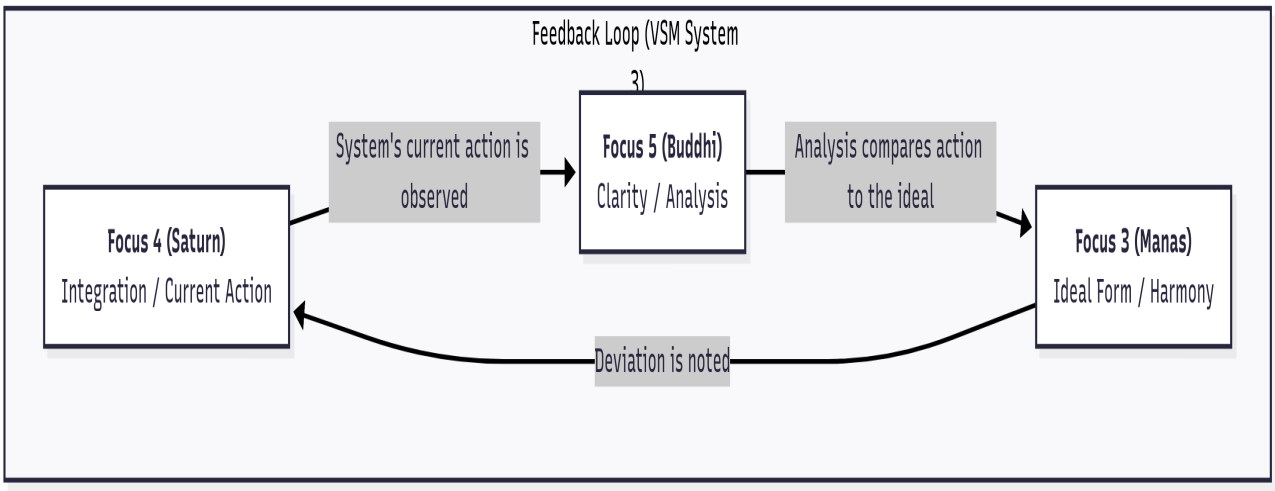


Diagram 1 : Feedback loop (reactive control)

Explanation of the Diagram and Foci Interaction

This is the system's core operational loop, focused on the "**Inside World" (The Inner Dialogue).** The system's current state of **Action/Integration (Focus 4)** is constantly monitored.

The analytical power of **Focus 5 (Mercury)** provides the **Clarity** to see this state accurately. This observation is then compared to the ideal state of **Form/Harmony (Focus 3/Venus)**.

If there's a deviation, **Focus 4** is activated again to make an integrative correction, bringing the system back into alignment with its harmonious form.

This is standard feedback control, ensuring the system does what it is supposed to be doing right now.

2. **Feedforward Loop (Proactive Control):** This is the strategic loop for anticipating the future. It answers the question: "What is coming from the *outside*, and how must I prepare?" It links the **Outside World** to the Inside World.

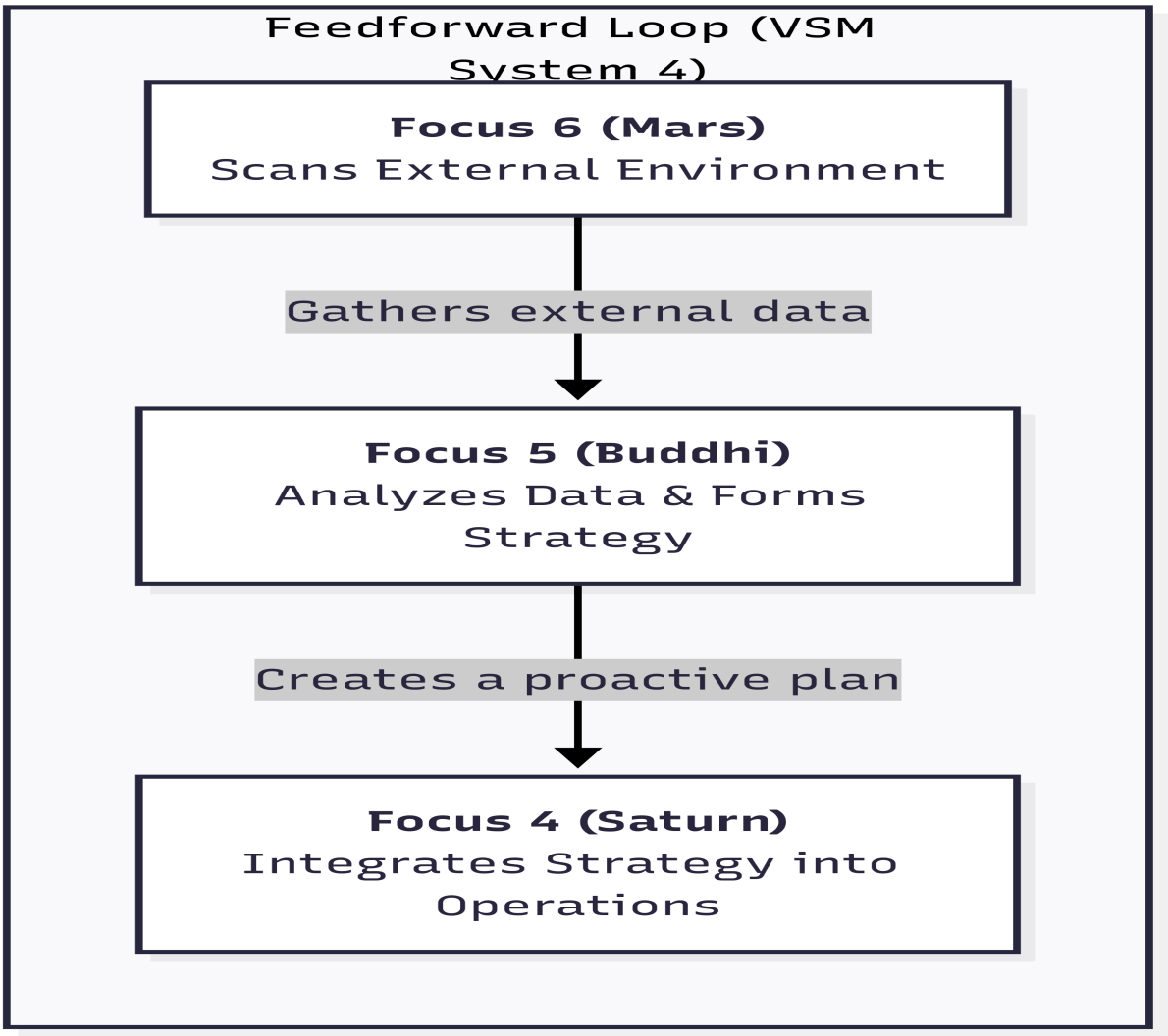


Diagram 2: feedforward loop (VSM subsystem 4)

The Feedforward Loop (The Outer Dialogue):

- This loop is the system's strategic connection to the "**Outside World.**"
- The outward-looking power of **Focus 6 (Motivation/Mars)** drives the system to form **Associations** with its environment, scanning for trends, opportunities, and threats.
- The interpretive power of **Focus 5 (Mercury)** takes this raw external data and provides the **Clarity** to analyze it, turning it into a coherent model or strategic plan.
- This strategic plan is then fed *forward* to the internal system (**Focus 4**) so it can proactively adjust its operations *before* the environmental change impacts it.
- **This is feedforward control**, allowing the system to prepare for the future.

3. Adaptive Control Loop (Evolutionary Control): This is the highest-level loop for learning and evolving. It answers the question: "Based on my experience, how can I become a better, wiser system?" It modifies the very identity and rules of the system. See diagram on the next page.

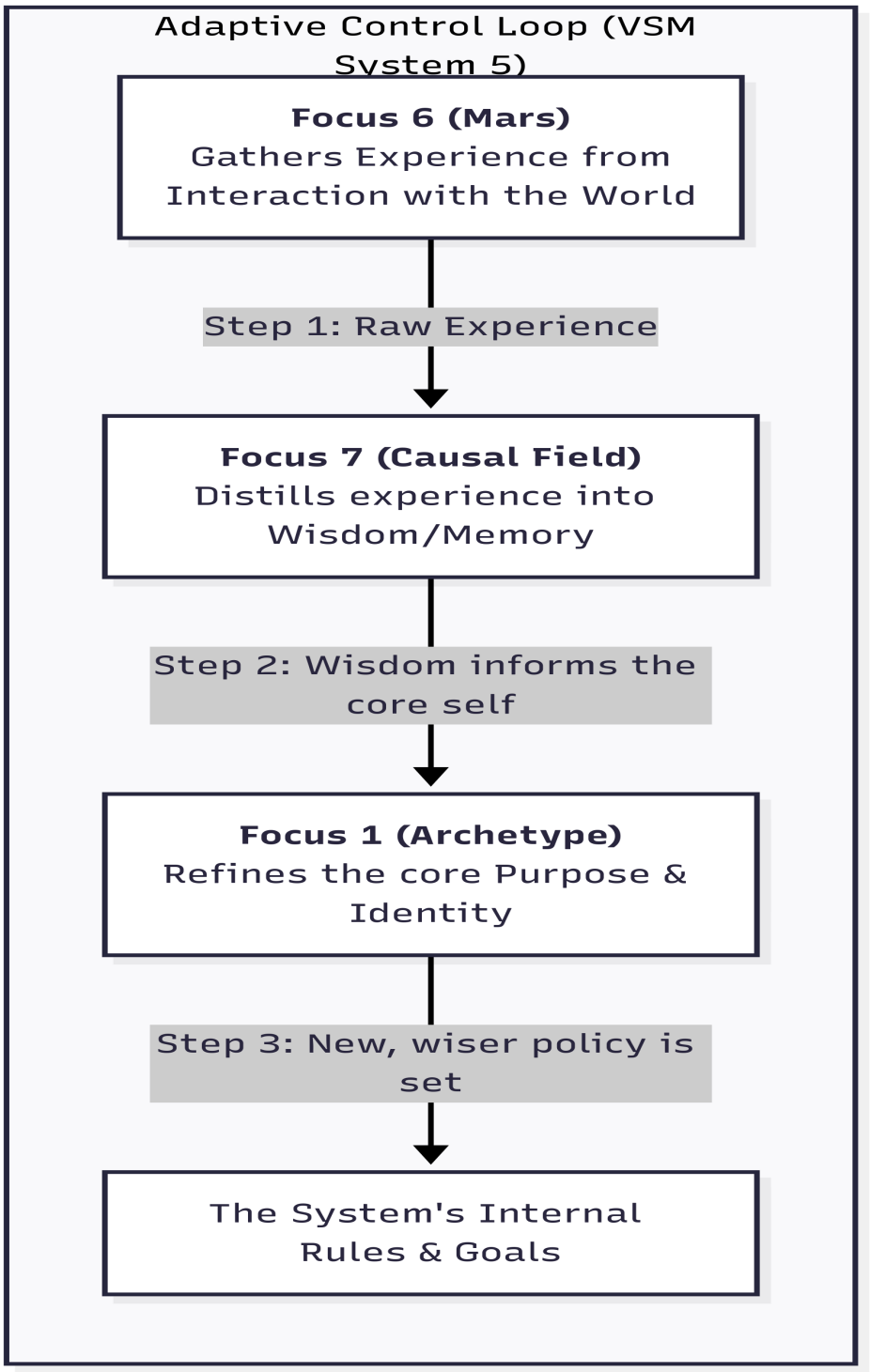


Diagram 3: the adaptive loop (VSM subsystem 5)

The Adaptive Control Loop (The Evolutionary Dialogue):

- This is the highest-level loop that envelops the entire system. It is how the system learns and evolves over time.
- All the experiences and information from both the feedback and feedforward loops—the successes, failures, and corrected errors—are distilled into **Wisdom (Focus 7)**. This focus is the repository of organizational or personal memory.
- This accumulated wisdom then informs and refines the very identity and purpose of the system—its core **Archetype (Focus 1)**.
- By updating the archetype, the system changes its own fundamental rules and goals. For example, a business might change its mission statement (Focus 1) based on years of market experience (Focus 7). This new, wiser policy then becomes the new standard for the feedback and feedforward loops.
- **This is adaptive information control**: the system uses information from its past and its environment to intelligently change its own purpose and structure for the future.

Clarefying the adaptive control loop further

Q. Can you clarify the statement "This accumulated wisdom then informs and refines the very identity and purpose of the system—its core Archetype (Focus 1)."? How does that work out for a plant, an animal or a human?

G. This is a crucial and profound question about the highest level of control in your model. The statement describes the **Adaptive Control Loop** from the diagram, where the system learns and evolves its own identity. Let's clarify how this works for a plant, an animal, and a human, using the logic of your sevenfold model.

The core idea is that **Focus 1 (Archetype)** is the system's fundamental identity or "source code," while **Focus 7 (Wisdom)** is the accumulated, lived experience. The adaptive loop is the process by which experience (F7) refines the expression of the source code (F1).

1. How it Works for a Plant (Epigenetic Adaptation)

- **Core Archetype (Focus 1):** This is the plant's fundamental genetic blueprint. It dictates that an acorn will become an oak tree, with all the inherent rules for its structure and function. It is the impersonal, species-level identity.

- **Accumulated Wisdom (Focus 7):** This is the **epigenetic memory** accumulated by the plant and its ancestors. Epigenetics are chemical tags that attach to DNA and change how genes are expressed without changing the DNA sequence itself. A plant that experiences a severe drought might develop epigenetic markers that make its offspring more drought-resistant. This "memory" of the drought is a form of accumulated wisdom.

- **How Wisdom Refines the Archetype:** The epigenetic markers (F7) don't change the fact that the plant is an oak tree (F1), but they **inform and refine** how that archetypal blueprint is expressed. The wisdom from past environmental stress allows the new generation of oak trees to activate their drought-resistance genes more efficiently. The core identity ("be an oak") is the same, but its purpose is refined to "be an oak that is better adapted to *this specific, dry environment*."

2. How it Works for an Animal (Behavioral Adaptation & Culture)

- **Core Archetype (Focus 1):** This is the animal's core instinctual programming. A wolf's archetype includes the drive to hunt, to form a pack, and to raise young. It is the inherent "wolfness" of the animal.

- **Accumulated Wisdom (Focus 7):** This is learned experience that modifies instinct. A wolf pack might fail several times trying to hunt a large moose. Through trial and error, they learn a new cooperative strategy that works. This new, successful strategy is now part of the pack's collective wisdom.

- **How Wisdom Refines the Archetype:** The learned hunting strategy (F7) updates the pack's operational identity (F1). Their purpose is still "to hunt as a pack," but it has been refined to "hunt as a pack *using this specific, effective technique*." This wisdom can then be passed down to the next generation through social learning, becoming a form of animal culture that refines the expression of the core instinct.

3. How it Works for a Human (Conscious Self-Transformation)

- **Core Archetype (Focus 1):** This is a person's core sense of identity, purpose, and values. It is their answer to the question, "Who am I and what is my purpose?"

- **Accumulated Wisdom (Focus 7):** This is the result of conscious self-reflection on life experience. A person might start a business based on a particular identity ("I am an aggressive entrepreneur"). After experiencing burnout and strained relationships, they reflect on this failure. The painful experience, processed through self-awareness, becomes wisdom.

- **How Wisdom Refines the Archetype:** This new wisdom (F7: "Aggressiveness leads to burnout and isolation") directly **informs and refines** their core identity (F1). The person might consciously change their purpose from "I want to win at all costs" to "I want to build a sustainable business that supports my well-being and relationships." They are still an entrepreneur, but the wisdom gained from experience has transformed the very purpose and identity that guides all their actions. This is the essence of conscious evolution and spiritual transformation.

Which Foci are Concerned with Different Types of Control?

This question requires mapping specific concepts from cybernetics and control theory onto the functions of your seven foci. The foci do not perform just one type of control, but their primary nature aligns with specific control functions.

Type of Control	Primary Governing Foci	Explanation of Correlation
Feedback Control (Reactive; corrects for error)	**Focus 4:** Integration, feedback control	This is a direct match. Your model explicitly names **Focus 4** as the center of **feedback control**. Its function is to manage the "Inside and Now," constantly receiving information from the operational parts, comparing it to the plan, and making corrective adjustments to maintain

		stability and integrate the system. This is the definition of a feedback loop.
Hierarchical Control (Top-down; command and constraint)	**Focus 1:** Archetype, impulse **Focus 7:** Wisdom, fulfillment	**Hierarchical control** flows from the highest policy-making level down. This is the domain of **Focus 1**, which provides the initial, top-down **impulse** and sets the absolute law or **archetype** for the entire system. **Focus 7** acts as the ultimate arbiter of this hierarchy, providing the **wisdom** that ensures the laws are applied correctly. Together, they act as VSM's System 5 (Policy), the ultimate source of authority.
Feedforward Control (Proactive; anticipates disturbances)	**Focus 6:** Association, motivation	**Feedforward control** requires looking at the external environment to anticipate future changes and make plans *before* a disturbance hits. This is the primary function of **Focus 6**. It forms **associations** with the external world (scanning for trends, threats, opportunities) and provides the **motivation** to create proactive, future-oriented strategies. This corresponds to VSM's System 4 (Intelligence).
Adaptive Control (Learning; changes its own structure)	**Focus 7:** Wisdom, fulfillment *(acting upon the whole system)*	**Adaptive control** is the ability of a system to learn from experience and change its own internal parameters or structure over time. This is the ultimate expression of **Focus 7**. It represents the process by which the system distills all past experiences (from feedback and feedforward control) into **wisdom**. This wisdom then allows the system to evolve, to change its own rules, and to achieve **fulfillment** by becoming more resilient and capable than it was before.

Clarification on adaptive information control

Based on an analysis of the provided files, particularly your own article "The World Soul and its seven centers of operation," here is a clarification on adaptive information control and its relation to your model:

1. Does this information change the previous mapping?

No, the concept of **adaptive information control** does not fundamentally change the mapping of your foci to the Viable System Model (VSM). Instead, it **enriches and clarifies it** by providing a more precise name for the highest level of systemic functioning.

- The VSM mapping showed that **System 4 (Strategy)** and **System 5 (Policy)** are responsible for adapting to the environment and adjusting goals.
- George Ellis' "adaptive information control" is a perfect description of this dynamic interplay: the system learns from its environment and adjusts its own goals and rules accordingly.

This concept reinforces the correlation we established, confirming that the higher foci are responsible for these advanced adaptive and strategic functions.

2. Which Foci are Concerned with Adaptive Information Control?

Mercury (Focus 5) is centrally involved, along with other key foci that work in collaboration. "TDC-4: Adaptive Information Control" maps to **Focus 5 and Focus 6**. The process can be understood as a collaboration of several foci:

1. **Focus 6 (Association, Motivation): The Environmental Sensor**

- Adaptive control begins with receiving inputs from the environment. **Focus 6** is the outward-looking function that forms **associations** with the external world. It provides the **motivation** to scan for new information, opportunities, and threats. It is the system's antenna.

2. **Focus 5 (Expansion, Clarity / Mercury): The Learning Processor**

- Once the information is received, it must be processed with **clarity**. This is the role of **Focus 5**, which you have associated with **Mercury**. It uses its analytical power to

make sense of the new data, allowing the system to "learn" from its experiences and **expand** its internal model of reality. As your document notes, Focus 5 "enables scalable networks (e.g., neural plasticity)", which is the very foundation of adaptation and learning.

3. **Focus 1 & 7 (Archetype & Wisdom): The Goal-Setting Policy Level**

- Adaptive control involves not just learning, but *adjusting the system's goals* based on that learning. This is a policy function. The new understanding forged by Foci 6 and 5 is fed back to the highest level.
- The system's core identity (**Focus 1: Archetype**) is updated by the new experience, which becomes assimilated as **Focus 7 (Wisdom)**. This allows the system to change its own rules and goals to better fulfill its purpose in a changing world.

In summary, adaptive information control is a sophisticated process governed by a collaboration of your higher foci. **Focus 6** engages with the environment, **Focus 5 (Mercury)** provides the clarity to learn from it, and **Focus 7** integrates this learning as wisdom to adapt the system's ultimate purpose, which is rooted in **Focus 1**.

Comment: All in all, the whole model entails a highly **dynamic system** with interplaying forces. We have just scratched the surface.

Final Mapping: VSM Control Features and Their Corresponding Foci

This table summarizes the complete, integrated mapping.

Control Feature (VSM Subsystem)	Primary Function	Interacting Foci Involved
System 5: Policy Control	Establishes the ultimate identity,	**Focus 1 (Archetype/Will)** & **Focus 7 (Causal**

Control Feature (VSM Subsystem)	Primary Function	Interacting Foci Involved
	ethos, and purpose of the entire system.	**Field/Wisdom)**
System 4: Strategic Control	Adapts to the external environment by creating future plans.	**Focus 5 (Buddhi), Focus 6 (Mars)**, & **Focus 4 (Saturn)**
System 3: Operational Control	Optimizes the "Inside and Now" by managing internal resources and creating synergy.	**Focus 3 (Manas), Focus 4 (Saturn), Focus 5 (Buddhi)**, & **Focus 6 (Mars)**
System 2: Coordination Control	Stabilizes and de-conflicts the operational units through rhythmic, pre-set rules.	**Focus 3 (Manas/Venus)** & **Focus 6 (Mars)**
System 3*: Audit Control	Performs deep checks and provides alerts about significant deviations from the norm.	**Focus 5 (Buddhi)** & **Focus 6 (Mars)**

Q. Can you include in this table all the control labels: hierachical control, feedback control, adaptive control, etc.?
G. By integrating the different types of control labels from cybernetics and systems theory into our mapping, we can add another layer of precision to the analysis. This clarifies *how* each VSM subsystem exerts its influence.

Here is the final, comprehensive table that includes the VSM subsystems, their corresponding foci, and their specific control feature labels.

Final Integrated Table: VSM Subsystems, Foci, and Control Features

Control Feature (VSM Subsystem)	Control Label & Type	Primary Function	Interacting Foci Involved
System 5: Policy Control	**Ultimate Cause Control** (Top-Down Constraint)	Establishes the ultimate identity, ethos, and purpose of the entire system.	**Focus 1 (Archetype/Will)** & **Focus 7 (Causal Field/Wisdom)**
System 4: Strategic Control	**Adaptive Control** (Goal-Oriented Feedback)	Adapts the entire system to the external environment by creating future plans.	**Focus 5 (Buddhi)**, **Focus 6 (Mars)**, & **Focus 4 (Saturn)**
System 3: Operational Control	**Hierarchical Control & Optimization**	Optimizes the "Inside and Now" by managing internal resources and creating synergy.	**Focus 3 (Manas)**, **Focus 4 (Saturn)**, **Focus 5 (Buddhi)**, & **Focus 6 (Mars)**
System 2: Coordination Control	**Programmatic Control** (Pre-set Rules)	Stabilizes and de-conflicts the operational units through rhythmic, pre-set rules (schedules, protocols).	**Focus 3 (Manas/Venus)** & **Focus 6 (Mars)**
System 3*: Audit Control	**Alerting Feedback Control**	Performs deep checks and provides alerts about significant deviations from the norm.	**Focus 5 (Buddhi)** & **Focus 6 (Mars)**

Control Feature (VSM Subsystem)	Control Label & Type	Primary Function	Interacting Foci Involved
System 1: Operations	**Autonomous Control**	The individual operational units that perform the primary work, each with its own internal controls.	Manifested result of **Focus 2 (Generation)** & **Focus 3 (Manas/Form)**

Analysis of the Control Labels:

- **Ultimate Cause Control (System 5):** This is the highest form of top-down causation, where the system's fundamental purpose and identity (its "why") constrain all lower-level activities.
- **Adaptive Control (System 4):** This is a sophisticated feedback loop where the system learns and changes its structure or strategy over time based on interaction with its environment to better achieve its goals.
- **Hierarchical Control (System 3):** This describes the classic management function where a higher level (System 3) has the authority to issue commands and allocate resources to a lower level (System 1) to optimize the performance of the whole.
- **Programmatic Control (System 2):** This is a simple, non-hierarchical control based on pre-set rules or programs (like a timetable or a traffic light system) that harmonizes interactions without active management.
- **Alerting Feedback Control (System 3*):** This is a specific type of feedback that doesn't report on routine data, but only sends an "alert" when a significant, unexpected event occurs that requires the attention of the higher management levels.

- **Autonomous Control (System 1):** This refers to the self-governing capabilities within each operational unit, allowing it to manage its own internal affairs without constant oversight.

Q. Where in the diagram can one find feedback control?

G. Excellent question. In the integrated model we have been building, "feedback control" is not located in a single box. Instead, it is a fundamental *process* that appears in several key areas of the diagram, each with a different function and timescale.

Here are the primary locations where feedback control can be found in the model:

1. VSM System 4: Adaptive Control Loop

The most significant feedback loop is the one governing **VSM System 4 (Strategic Control)**.

- **The Loop:** This is a long-term, goal-oriented feedback loop.

1. The system acts upon the external environment.
2. It gathers information about the results of its actions and changes in the environment (this is the **feedback**).
3. This information is analyzed by the strategic function (Foci 5 & 6).
4. The system then *adapts* its overall strategy or structure (Focus 4/Saturn) to better achieve its ultimate purpose (Focus 1).

- **Control Type:** This is **Adaptive Control**, which is concerned with the evolution and long-term viability of the entire system.

2. VSM System 3: Operational Feedback Loop

The next crucial feedback loop is within **VSM System 3 (Operational Control)**.

- **The Loop:** This is a short-to-medium-term feedback loop for managing the "Inside and Now."

1. The operational units (System 1) perform their work.

2. System 3 monitors their performance through various information channels (this is the **feedback**).
3. The Manasic function (Focus 3) compares this performance against the desired optimum.
4. System 3 then makes corrective adjustments, such as reallocating resources or issuing new commands, to bring the system back to peak efficiency.

- **Control Type:** This is **Hierarchical Feedback Control** or **Optimization Control**.

3. VSM System 3*: The Audit Loop

A special and very important type of feedback is found in **VSM System 3* (Audit Control)**.

- **The Loop:** This is an *exception-based* feedback loop.

1. The Buddhic function (Focus 5) and the RAS perform a deep scan of the internal state, ignoring routine data.
2. If a significant anomaly or "stress signal" is detected, it triggers an "alert" (Focus 6 provides the energetic signal).
3. This alert is the **feedback**, which is sent directly to the higher management levels (System 3) for immediate attention.

- **Control Type:** This is **Alerting Feedback Control**, designed to report only critical deviations from the norm.

In summary, feedback control is a pervasive and essential mechanism woven throughout the entire VSM structure. It is the process by which a viable system gathers information about itself and its environment to maintain stability, optimize performance, and adapt for survival.

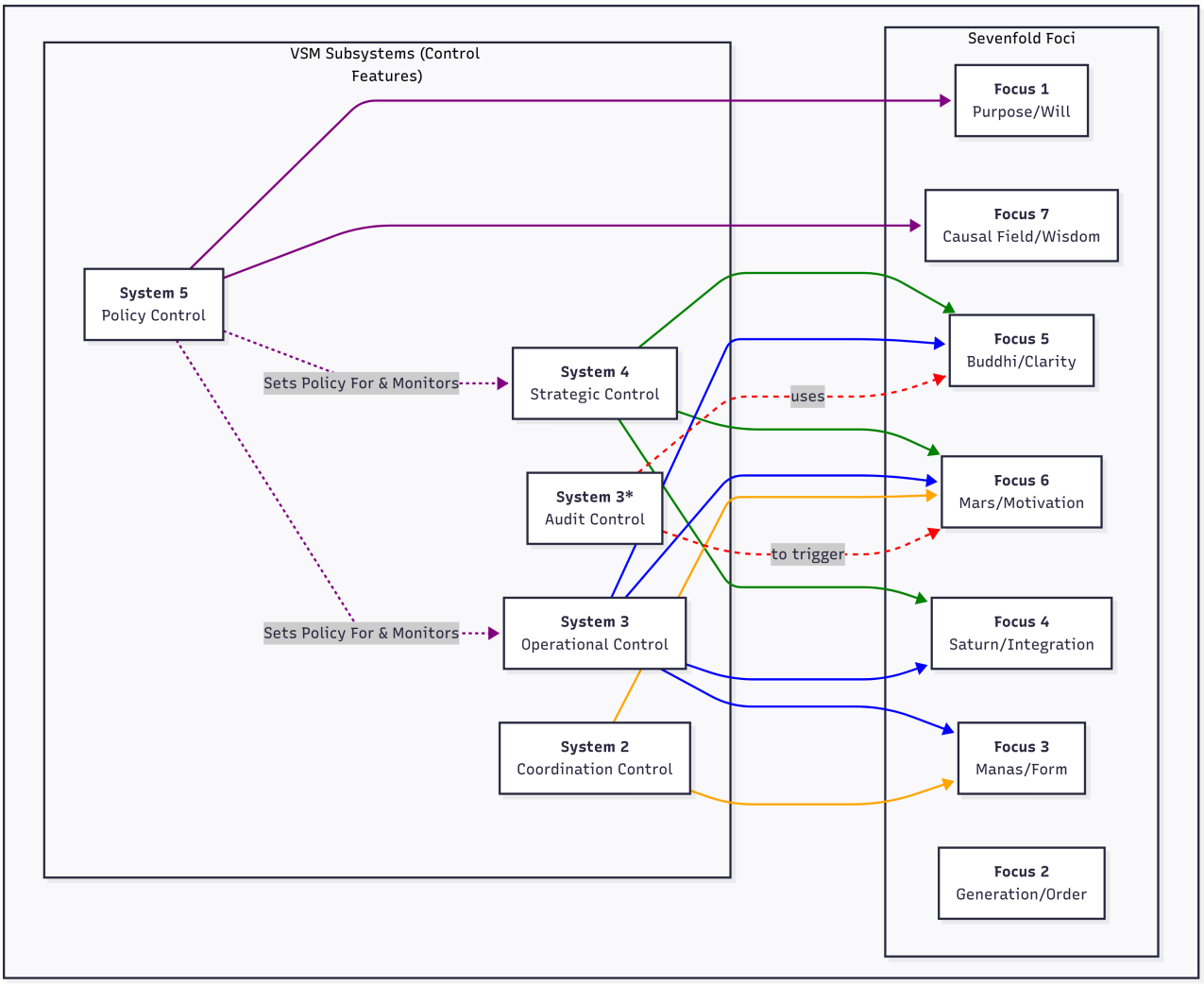


Diagram 4: VSM Control Features and Their Constituent Foci

How to Read This Diagram:

This diagram shows each VSM subsystem and uses arrows to point to all the foci that interact to create its specific function. The "overlaps" are now clear:

- You can see that **Focus 6 (Mars)** is a component of four different control systems (S4, S3, S2, and S3*).
- You can see that **System 3** is the most complex, drawing influences from Foci 3, 4, 5, and 6.
- The lines are colored, helping to group the control features visually.

Q. Why doesn't the diagram show arrows to Focus 2?

G. This is an excellent, subtle question. You are correct—the diagram does not show any of the primary VSM control systems directly using **Focus 2 (Generation)**.
This is not an omission, but a reflection of the VSM's specific architecture and how it relates to your model.

Here's the analysis:

Focus 2 is not a control feature; it is a foundational, operational process.

1. **VSM is a Model of Control and Communication:** The Viable System Model is specifically a model of the *management*, *control*, and *communication* structures necessary for a system to be viable. Its subsystems (2, 3, 4, 5, 3*) are all concerned with *regulating* the primary work.

2. **Focus 2 is Part of the Primary Work:** In your model, **Focus 2 (Generation)** is the fundamental process of creating the raw substance and initial order of the operational units. It is part of the work itself, not the management of the work. It is the "factory floor" where the components of **VSM System 1** are built.

3. **The Control Systems Act UPON What Focus 2 Has Generated:**

- **System 2 (Coordination)** doesn't generate anything; it coordinates the rhythms of the units that Focus 2 has already generated.

- **System 3 (Optimization)** doesn't generate the units; it manages the resources for the units that Focus 2 has already generated.

- **System 4 (Strategy)** may decide that *new* generation is needed, but it doesn't do the generating itself; it sends that command down to the operational level where Focus 2 will carry it out.
  Therefore, there are no arrows from the VSM *control* subsystems to Focus 2, because **Focus 2 represents the very operational reality that the control systems are**

designed to manage. It is the "what" that is being controlled, not part of the control mechanism itself.
(end G.)

What's next? A short evaluation

What have we achieved thus far? Quite a lot, actually. There is now a mapping from the VSM subsystems to the dynamic interacting foci, the centers of intelligent operation of the World Soul, as pertaining to our planet Earth. The subsystems have become associated with conscious forces, elements and beings, as we may explore further, in later research. The feedback features have been discussed and have been related to the functions of the foci.
The model shows the *analogy* in the use of organizational principles, as illustrated in the discussion of the VSM subsystems working in plants, animals and humans. This can be explored further. For example, I have mapped the development of autonomy in humans (Jane Loevinger's stages) onto the (extended) Lievegoed stages. This will be shown in part four of this series, as well as a first exploration of the evolution of plants, animals and humans. Value systems are a target of inspection as well.

Appendix A

George Ellis's five causes; Integrating the five causes into the model

Q. Can you summarize the five topdown causes described by George Ellis?

G. Of course. Here is a comprehensive summary of George Ellis's five types of top-down causation, based on the document you provided.

Summary: George Ellis's Five Types of Top-Down Causation

In his analysis of complex systems, George Ellis proposes that the simple, bottom-up view of causation—where lower-level physical interactions determine everything—is insufficient to explain reality. To provide a complete picture, especially in biology, one must include "top-down" causation, where higher levels of organization constrain and influence the lower levels. Ellis identifies five distinct types of such causation.

1. TDC1: Formal Cause (Algorithms and the Rules of the Game)
The first type of top-down causation is the influence of abstract rules, algorithms, or logical structures that govern a system's behavior. This is not a physical force but an underlying formal blueprint that dictates the possibilities for the system. The key example given is the genetic code in DNA. The DNA sequence itself doesn't physically push atoms into place, but the abstract informational pattern it contains determines which proteins will be built, thereby constraining and guiding the lower-level biochemistry of the cell. This formal cause sets the "rules of the game" within which all other interactions must operate.

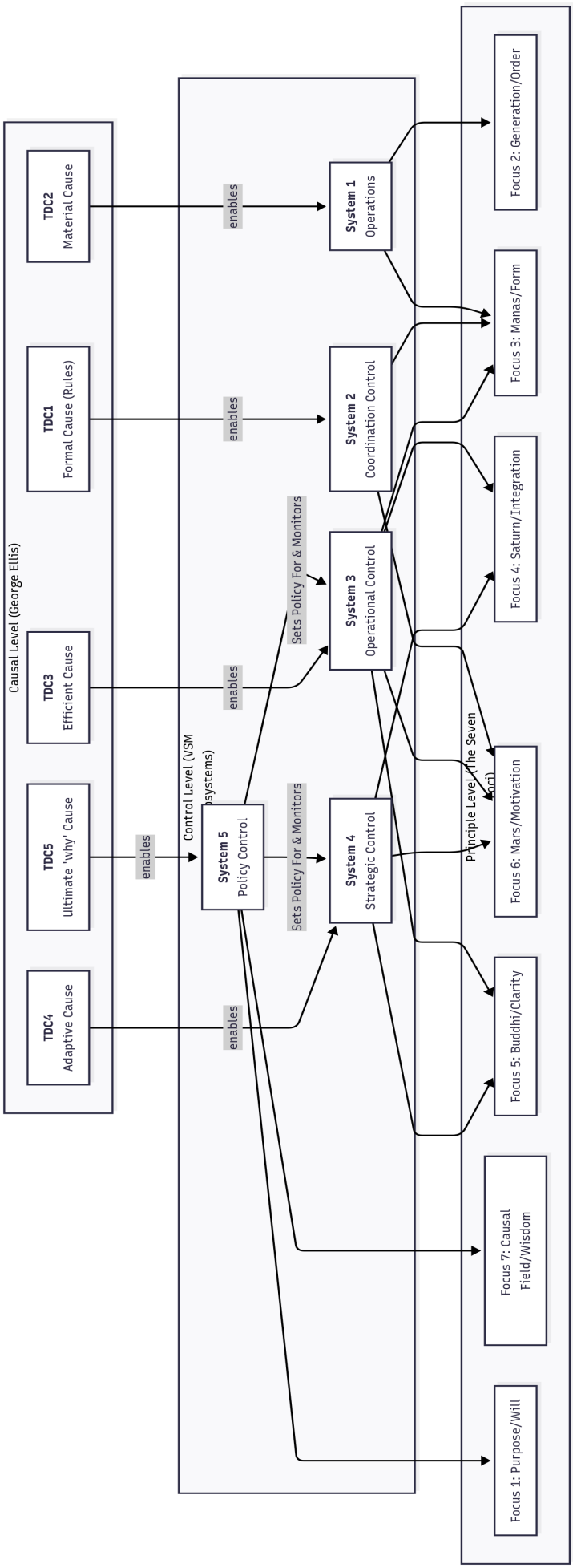
2. TDC2: Material Cause (The Nature of the Components)
The second type of causation comes from the nature of the physical components, or the "stuff" from which things are made. The properties of the lower-level constituents constrain the possible structures and functions of the higher-level system. For example, the specific chemical properties of amino acids (the material cause) determine how a protein chain can fold, which in turn determines its biological function. The very possibility of life as we know it is constrained by the unique properties of carbon, which allow it to form the complex molecules necessary for biological organisms. This is a form of top-down causation because the requirements of the higher-level system (e.g., the need for a functional protein) select for and are limited by the properties of the available lower-level materials.

3. TDC3: Efficient Cause (Direct Physical Interactions)
This is the most familiar type of causation, representing the direct physical or energetic interactions that "make it happen". Examples include a nerve signal triggering a muscle to contract or one molecule binding to another. However, Ellis emphasizes that even these direct physical causes are often governed by higher-level structures. For instance, a nerve signal is an efficient cause, but the entire nervous system network within which it travels (a higher-level structure) determines where that signal can go and what its ultimate effect will be. Thus, the higher-level context channels and gives meaning to the lower-level efficient causes.

4. TDC4: Adaptive Cause (The Shaping Process of Feedback)
This type of causation is central to all of biology. It is the process of "shaping" a system over time through feedback mechanisms and selection. The key principle is that the system adapts its structure or function based on its performance in a specific environment. Natural selection is the ultimate example: the environment provides feedback by determining which organisms survive to reproduce. This feedback then "reaches down" to alter the gene pool (TDC1) of the population over time. On an individual level, learning is another form of adaptive causation, where feedback from experience reshapes the neural pathways of the brain to produce more successful behaviors.

5. TDC5: Ultimate 'Why' Cause (The Purpose of the System)
The fifth and highest form of top-down causation is the influence of the overall purpose for which the system exists. This ultimate cause determines the goals for which all the other adaptive processes (TDC4) strive. In biology, the ultimate purpose is typically defined as survival and reproduction. This "why" determines what constitutes "fitness" for the adaptive cause. For example, the need to survive in a desert environment (the ultimate cause) sets the specific goals for which natural selection (the adaptive cause) will shape an organism—in this case, for traits like water conservation and heat tolerance. This top-level purpose provides the ultimate context and direction for all the lower-level causal processes.

The same diagram as diagram 4 above can be drawn now, with the five downward causes (George Ellis) included:



This diagram includes the crucial arrows from System 5 to Systems 3 and 4, representing its function as the ultimate monitor and policy-setter for the entire viable system.

Final Integrated Table

Control Feature (VSM Subsystem)	Control Label & Type	George Ellis's Cause (TDC)	Primary Function	Interacting Foci Involved
System 5: Policy Control	**Ultimate Cause Control** (Top-Down Constraint & Monitoring)	**TDC5: Ultimate 'why' Cause**	Establishes identity and purpose; **monitors the entire system to ensure adherence to policy.**	**Focus 1 (Archetype/Will)** & **Focus 7 (Causal Field/Wisdom)**
System 4: Strategic Control	Adaptive Control	**TDC4: Adaptive Cause**	Adapts the system to the external environment based on feedback.	**Focus 5 (Buddhi)**, **Focus 6 (Mars)**, & **Focus 4 (Saturn)**
System 3: Operational Control	Hierarchical Control & Optimization	**TDC3: Efficient Cause**	Optimizes the "Inside and Now" through direct management and resource allocation.	**Focus 3 (Manas)**, **Focus 4 (Saturn)**, **Focus 5 (Buddhi)**, & **Focus 6 (Mars)**
System 2: Coordination Control	Programmatic Control	**TDC1: Formal Cause**	Stabilizes and de-conflicts operational units through pre-set "rules of the game."	**Focus 3 (Manas/Venus)** & **Focus 6 (Mars)**
System 1:	Autonomous	**TDC2:**	The physical	Manifested result

Control Feature (VSM Subsystem)	Control Label & Type	George Ellis's Cause (TDC)	Primary Function	Interacting Foci Involved
Operations	Control	**Material Cause**	components or "stuff" of the system; the operational units.	of **Focus 2 (Generation)** & **Focus 3 (Manas/Form)**

Q. Is TDC4 the same as adaptive information control? Isn't there a difference with adaptive control?

G. You have asked a very precise and important question. Yes, there is a subtle but crucial difference between "adaptive control" as a general concept and what one might call "adaptive information control." The latter is a specific *method* for achieving the former.
Let's break it down.

Adaptive Control (The General Principle)

Adaptive Control is a broad category in control theory and cybernetics. It refers to any control system that can **change its own internal parameters or structure over time in response to feedback from the system it is controlling and the environment.** The goal is to maintain performance and viability even when the conditions change.

- **George Ellis's TDC4 (Adaptive Cause)** is a perfect description of this general principle. It is the "shaping" process where feedback and selection determine fitness. The adaptation could be anything—a change in physical form, a change in strategy, or a change in behavior.

Adaptive Information Control (A Specific Method)

"Adaptive information control" is not a standard term, but it beautifully describes a key way that complex systems achieve adaptive control. It means **adapting a**

system by changing the *information* it pays attention to, how it interprets that information, or the rules it uses to act on that information.
This is a higher-level, more intelligent form of adaptation than simply changing a physical parameter.

The Difference in a Nutshell:

- **Adaptive Control** is about changing the **system**.
- **Adaptive Information Control** is about changing the **model of the world** that the system uses to govern itself.

Examples to Clarify the Distinction

Imagine a company (our VSM system) trying to adapt to a changing market (**TDC4**).

1. **Simple Adaptive Control (Not informational):**

- The company observes that its sales are dropping.
- The feedback is simple: lower profits.
- The adaptive response is to lower the price of its product.
- The system has adapted its *output parameter* (price) based on feedback, but it hasn't necessarily changed its understanding of the world.

2. **Adaptive Information Control:**

- The company observes that its sales are dropping.
- Instead of just reacting, it performs a deep market analysis (VSM System 3* audit). It gathers new kinds of information—customer surveys, competitor analysis, social media trends.
- It discovers the *reason* for the sales drop: a new competitor has a better product, and customer values have shifted towards sustainability.
- The company now **adapts its information model**. It decides that "competitor features" and "sustainability score" are now critical data points, whereas before it only paid attention to sales volume.
- Based on this *new information framework*, it then adapts its strategy (**VSM System 4**), perhaps by launching a new, more sustainable product line.

In the second example, the control is far more sophisticated. The system didn't just change a parameter; it changed its entire understanding of what information is important, which then led to a much more effective strategic adaptation.

Conclusion:
TDC4 (Adaptive Cause) is the overarching principle of adaptive control. The complex feedback loop we mapped to **VSM System 4**—involving Buddhi (Focus 5) to discern new patterns and Manas (Focus 3) to build new models—is a perfect example of achieving that adaptation through the specific and powerful method of **adaptive information control**.

Bibliography

Stafford Beer: The Brain of the Firm, 2nd edition, 1981, John Wiley & Sons

George Ellis' work on top down causation

My Articles on the World Soul (part one, part two)